

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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R 071455Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5384

INFT AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

AMEMBASSY LILONGWE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L MAPUTO 028

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MZA

SUBJ: VISIT TO BAZARUTO ISLAND

REF: (A) STATE 28391; (B) USNATO 5797 (NOTAL); (C) USDAO

LISBON IR6-879-0565-76 (NOTAL); (D) MAPUTO 1301 (NOTAL);

(E) MAPUTO 1249 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: ON JAN 3 THE GOVERNMENT OF MOZAMBIQUE (GPRM) ARRANGED A SPECIAL OVERFLIGHT OF BAZARUTO ISLAND FOR SIX AMBASSADORS AND CHARGES. PURPOSE WAS TO DISPROVE REPORTS THAT SOVIETS ARE BUILDING A MILITARY BASE ON BAZARUOT ISLAND. OBSERVATION FROM LOW-FLYING PLANE REVEALED NO EVIDENCE OF RECENT CONSTRUCTION OF ANY KIND. AS MATTER FACT, THERE LITTLE EVIDENCE OF ANY ACTIVITY WHATSOEVER EXCEPT FOR FEW THATCHED HUTS, SOME FISHING CANOES, A LIGHTHOUSE AND TWO OR THREE SMALL HOUSES NEAR LIGHTHOUSE.

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TRIP TO WESTERN COAST OF ISLAND BY BOAT JAN 2 LIKEWISE REVEALED NOTHING UNTOWARD. MY CONCLUSION, SHARED BY MY DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES, IS THAT REPORTS OF SOVIET MILITARY CONSTRUCTION ON ISLAND ARE FALSE. END SUMMARY

2. AFTER REPEATED REQUESTS FROM MEMBERS DIPLOMATIC CORPS FOR PERMISSION TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE OF MAPUTO, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN

AFFAIRS ARRANGED TRIP FOR HEADS OF MISSIONS TO VISIT INHAMBANE AND GAZA PROVINCES DECEMBER 30 TO JAN 4. SINCE TRIP WAS TO INCLUDE STAY AT SANTA CAROLINA ISLAND, WHICH ONLY FEW MILES EAST OF BAZARUTO ISLAND, SEVERAL AMBASSADORS, MYSELF INCLUDED, REQUESTED PERMISSION TO VISIT BAZARUTO ISLAND, WHICH ALLEGEDLY IS BEING DEVELOPED AS A SITE FOR A SOVIET NAVAL/AIR BASE (REF-TELS A, B AND C).

3. MINISTRY, WHICH HAS PUBLICLY DENIED THE CHARGE, AGREED TO ARRANGE SUCH TRIP. THERE WERE HOWEVER, MOMENTS DURING THE EXCURSION WHEN IT APPEARED BUREAUCRATIC RED TAPE WOULD WIN OUT AND TRIP WOULD NOT TAKE PLACE.

MAIN OBSTACLE WAS REFUSAL OF AIR CHARTER PILOTS TO OVERFLY ISLAND WITHOUT GPRM AUTHORIZATION. THEY SAID THEY WERE STRICTLY PROHIBITED FROM FLYING OVER BAZRUTO WITHOUT THIS AUTHORIZATION. THEY WOULD NOT ACCEPT THE WORD OF JOSE MASSINGA, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION IN FOREIGN MINISTRY WHO ACCOMPANIED DIPLOMATS ON TRIP. ONLY AFTER THREE DAYS OF EFFORT WAS WORD FINALLY PASSED FROM MINISTRY OF INTERIOR IN MAPUTO TO CHARTER COMPANY AND THENCE TO PILOTS.

4. FLIGHT TOOK PLACE FROM 1430 TO 1530 HOURS ON JAN 4. INVITED TO PARTICIPATE WERE AMBASSADORS FROM FRANCE, FRG AND PAKISTAN, CHARGES FROM ITALY AND NETHERLANDS AND MYSELF. AIRCRAFT WAS SIX-SEATER PIPER NAVAJO. FLIGHT ORIGINATED VILANCULOS AND INCLUDED FLIGHTS OVER NOT ONLY BAZARUTO ISLAND BUT SAO ANTONIO AND SANTA ISABEL ISLANDS (BOTH JUST SOUTH OF BAZARUTO) AS WELL. MASSINGA SAID PILOT COULD FLY WHERE WE WISHED AND WE COULD TAKE PHOTOS. WEATHER WAS SUNNY AND CLEAR AND AT ALTITUDE OF 300 FEET
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WE HAD GOOD VIEW OF ALL PARTS OF ISLANDS, INCLUDING EASTERN SHORE OF BAZARUTO WHERE SOVIETS WERE ALLEGED TO BE ACTIVE.

5. THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF RECENT CONSTRUCTION ON ANY OF THE ISLANDS. ONLY BUILDINGS ON BAZARUTO ARE LIGHTHOUSE, TWO OR THREE SMALL CEMENT HOUSES NEAR LIGHTHOUSE, AND SCATTERED THATCHED HUTS (PROBABLY TWENTY) FOR LOCAL FISHERMEN. THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY ROADS (OR FOUR-WHEELED TRACKS), NOR ANY SIGN OF ANY VEHICLES WHATSOEVER. THERE WAS ALSO NO EVIDENCE OF ANY JETTIES OR PIERS APART FROM WHAT APPEARED BE SMALL CEMENT RAMP NEAR LIGHTHOUSE. THERE IS NO AIRSTRIP ON ISLAND.

6. THE TWO SMALLER ISLANDS SOUTH OF BAZARUTO EACH HAD SMALL AIRSTRIPS FOR LIGHT AIRCRAFT. ISLAND JUST SOUTH OF BAZARUTO (SAO ANTONIO) HAD ONE A-FRAME BUILDING, THE SIZE OF A MEDIUM-SIZED HOUSE. AT ISLAND FURTHEST SOUTH (SANTA ISABEL), WHICH HAD BEEN SITE OF SUMMER HOUSE OF RHODESIAN, THERE WAS A BUNGALOW AND CLUSTER OF A HALF DOZEN OR SO SMALL RECTANGULAR BUILDINGS, PRESUMABLY HOUSES OF STAFF. NO VEHICLES WERE NOTICED ON EITHER

ISLAND.

7. ON JAN 2, THE DIPLOMATIC PARTY VISITED A BEACH ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF BAZARUTO ISLAND BY BOAT AND CRUISED ALONG ABOUT TWO-THIRDS OF THE WESTERN SHORE OF ISLAND. AGAIN NOTHING UNTOWARD WAS NOTED.

8. COMMENT: WHILE NO MEMBER OF THE DIPLOMATIC CONTINGENT ON FLIGHT IS TRAINED AS AIR OBSERVER, WE ALL RETURNED CONVINCED THAT REPORTS OF SOVIET MILITARY CONSTRUCTION ON BAZARUTO ISLAND ARE FALSE. QUESTION REMAINS OF WHY PILOTS HAD BEEN PROHIBITED FROM FLYING OVER THE ISLANDS IF THERE WAS NOTHING TO OBSERVE. EXPLANATION GIVEN BY MASSINGA WAS THAT THE RHODESIAN OWNER OF THE HOUSE ON THE SOUTHERN MOST ISLAND HAD BEEN FLYING IN AND OUT OF HIS SMALL ISLAND, AND THE GPRM HAD NO IDEA OF WHAT HE WAS UP TO. THIS WAS UNACCEPTABLE TO GPRM, AND THE PROSCRIPTION ON FLIGHT TO OR OVER BAZARUTO IMPOSED. EMBASSY HAS NO WAY OF
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CHECKING VALIDITY OF THIS EXPLANATION. THE PILOT OF THE CHARTERED AIRCRAFT THOUGHT IT MADE SENSE.

9. TWO ROLLS OF FILM WERE TAKEN OF THE ISLANDS. FILM WILL BE POUCHED TO AF/S.
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